



Notes from Underground

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Study Guide



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Summary

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Summary

The Underground Man arrives at Simonov's apartment to find Simonov with two other former schoolmates. They are discussing plans for a farewell dinner for Zverkov, another former schoolmate who is now an officer in the army. The Underground Man remembers Zverkov as one of his least favorite classmates. He was handsome, confident, wealthy, and popular. The Underground Man considered Zverkov vulgar, and hated Zverkov's boasting about his future successes with women and in duels.

Zverkov has had success in the army and with women ever since he left school, and he no longer greets the Underground Man on the street. Simonov's two guests are both admirers of Zverkov: Ferfichkin, an "enemy" of the Underground Man from school who often borrows money from Zverkov; and Trudolyubov, whom the Underground Man considers honest but too focused on success. Although all three men essentially ignore the Underground Man from the moment he enters the room, he insists on being included in the farewell dinner, feeling that an offer to contribute money for the meal will make the other men respect him. Simonov hesitates, irritated with the Underground Man, but ultimately allows him to join the dinner. When the other men leave, Simonov invents an excuse and says that he must run off. The Underground Man awkwardly leaves the apartment.

After leaving, the Underground Man regrets everything he has just done. He knows that he is not wanted at the dinner, he hates Zverkov, and he does not have enough money to pay for the meal. However, he knows that he will still go to the dinner: the more inappropriate it is for him to go, the

more likely it is that he will go. He decides to spend the money that he owes Apollon, his servant, on dinner.

That night, the Underground Man remembers his time at school. He was an orphan, and distant relatives sent him to a school where the other students derided him because he was different from them. He hated the other children, who were narrow-minded, worshiped only success, and mocked "everything that was just." Their faces grew more stupid with every year spent at school. Hoping to avoid their mockery, the Underground Man became one of the best students at the school. He impressed the others with his knowledge of books and the respect he gained from his teachers. He made one friend among his classmates, but he treated the friend tyrannically. When the friend's will was broken, the Underground Man pushed him away. After he left school the Underground Man broke all ties with his former life. He even abandoned the "special service" for which he had been trained, in order to pursue a humbler career.

The Underground Man spends the next day dreading and preparing for the dinner. He imagines it will somehow prove to be a turning point in his life. He examines his shabby wardrobe and discovers a spot on his trousers that will make him look undignified in the eyes of his dinner companions. He imagines the other men's disdain in elaborate detail, despairing that his predicament will be so banal and "non-literary." Still, the Underground Man wants to prove to the others that he is not a coward. He entertains fantasies in which he wins over all of his former classmates with his wit and intelligence. At the same time, he maintains that none of his worries are important at all. He passes the day in nervous agony until his "wretched little wall clock hisse[s] five," at which point he spends his last fifty kopecks on a coach to take him to dinner.

Analysis

In the Underground Man's description of Zverkov we see the model for his later discussions of the active but stupid man. The Underground Man has no respect for Zverkov, believing him to be arrogant and dull-witted, but he is aware that Zverkov's confidence has won him many accomplishments, as well as friends and admirers. The Underground Man fantasizes about Zverkov admiring the Underground Man's brilliance and sensitivity and offering himself in friendship, and he reveals an intense desire to be liked and accepted by the men he disdains most. This desire is colored by the Underground Man's egoism—he can only imagine being admired, not simply accepted or liked—and his lack of experiences outside of books. As always, the Underground Man's fantasy takes a highly “literary” form, involving dramatic and literary conventions.

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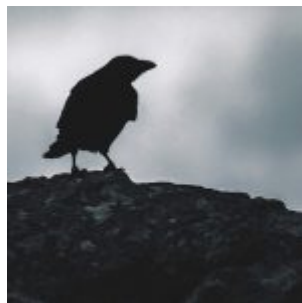
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Take a study break

Take the **Part 2, Chapter 3**
Quick Quiz

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Lyric or a Quote by Edgar
Allan Poe?

The 7 Most Embarrassing
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Notes

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CHARACTERS



The Underground Man: Character Analysis

CHARACTERS



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Take a Study Break



QUIZ: Is This a Taylor Swift Lyric or a Quote by Edgar Allan Poe?



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The 6 Best and Worst TV Show Adaptations of Books



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